

**A DISCOURSE DELIVERED IN THE  
FIRST CHURCH OF DOVER, MAY  
18, 1873, ON THE TWO HUNDRED  
AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY**

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A discourse delivered in the first church of dover, may 18, 1873, on the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary by George B. Spalding

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**GEORGE B. SPALDING**

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AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY**



# A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE

FIRST CHURCH OF DOVER, MAY 18, 1873,

ON THE

## Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary

OF THE

SETTLEMENT OF DOVER, N. H.,

By GEORGE B. SPALDING,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH.

*[Published by Request.]*

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## DISCOURSE.

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THE GLORY OF CHILDREN IS THEIR FATHERS. *Proverbs 17: 6.*

We live in a country whose national history has not yet reached its first centennial. Our oldest institutions are almost of yesterday. Our most ancient structures are free from the moss and stains of age. Our ideas, and associations, and even our memories are within the boundaries of the near and present. It is, therefore, difficult for us to connect ourselves with an event which antedates by centuries the lives of most of us, an event which is farther removed from the birthday of the nation than that day is removed from the present.

Two Hundred and Fifty years ago! Then James the First was on the throne of England, nearing the end of his vices and stupidities. Shakespeare was but just resting in his tomb from his immortal labors. Galileo was getting ready his heretical solar system to lay at the feet of the newly elected Pope. Bacon still lived, and wrote with all his wonted profundity of thought and splendor of eloquence. Milton, that year, a youth of marvelous beauty,\* entered

the University at Cambridge. "Rare Ben Johnson" was busy with his court masques and comedies. Sidney was a boy playing at his mother's feet.

Here, this side the great water, a feeble colony of Englishmen was holding its position on the Virginian coast at a vast expenditure of money and a great sacrifice of human life. That very year they were fighting the Indians through tangled woods and swamps. That very year a feebler colony of Englishmen was passing a third year on the Massachusetts coast, living on five kernels of corn to the individual.\* In May of that year, two hundred and fifty years ago this Sabbath, one hundred persons, weak with sickness and starvation, laid down at night "not knowing," according to their own record, "where to have a Bit in the Morning, having neither Bread nor Corn; yet," adds the writer, "we bear our Wants with Cheerfulness, and rest on Providence."†

In the same year and month of May, a boat from an English ship came up the river Piscataqua. It bore a little company of men, none of whom are known to us by name, except two brothers, Edward and William Hilton.‡ They steered straight on up the broad stream until they came to a point of land made by the flowing in of another river.

It was not the first time that these waters had been stirred by a foreign keel, and, perhaps, it was not the first time that this point of land had been trodden by foreign feet. Twenty years before this, Captain Martin Pring had sailed up this channel "3 or 4 leagues,"—perhaps ten miles,—and had explored its banks for sassafras, which was held in high estimation in Europe for its aromatic and medicinal

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\*Bancroft's Hist. of U. S. Little, Brown & Co. Vol. 1, p. 315.

†Prince's Annals of N. E., first edition, vol. 1, p. 135.

‡Prince's Annals, vol. 1, p. 134.



qualities. Nine years before, the renowned Capt. John Smith had sailed along its wooded banks, and, on his return, had written in admiration of "the deep waters of Piscataqua."<sup>\*</sup>

But the keel which now grated along the shore until it rested in some nook of the land turned not back. The two brothers, with their few associates, were soon "lifting up axes upon the thick trees." They threw up a rude house or two. Into them they gathered the articles and instruments, which they had brought with them, necessary for a fishery. They came to stay. And so Dover was born and cradled, and put to rest for at least eight years. At the end of that time, it could boast the possession of only three houses.

Let us recall the features of the scene which these founders gazed upon. The same sky of blue and cloud; the same unrivalled water view, of rivers with their shining arms, and great placid bays, all pulsing with the ocean's life; the same rounded mountain and swelling hills; all this, which fills us at each now beholding with increased admiration, met their eyes also. But the scene to them was wilder, fuller and richer. The "Neck," now so bare, was clothed from summit down to the water's edge with lordly pines and oaks, whose dense foliage swayed to and fro in the wind and sighed responsive to the ocean's roar. Innumerable trailing vines, many of them flaunting in gayest colors, interlaced the trees and rendered passage difficult. The deer had their well worn paths to the springs and grasses of the lower land. The rivers were filled with fish, and with all kind of water fowls. It was a scene which, to those men accustomed to the open, cultivated fields of England, must have

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<sup>\*</sup>Bancroft's Hist. of U. S., vol. 1, p. 114. *Ibid.*, p. 328.

been almost terrible in its beauty. Probably, at that time, there were only a few Indians in the region. Years before it must have been a favorite place to them. But the entire eastern coast of New England, just before its settlement by white men, had been swept clean of its inhabitants by a great pestilence. The Pilgrims found in the neighborhood of Plymouth vast burial grounds, and bleaching bones scattered everywhere.\* The Indians whom they saw were few in number, the fragments of once powerful tribes. There was no savage whoop to smite with fear the Hiltons and their companions. They were startled by no other sound than the mighty crash of some monarch tree, which, at some moment of profound stillness, having reached the measure of its days, trembled and fell, ringing its own knell through all the solitude around. Unmolested and unobserved, the white invaders plied their occupations, curing fish and furs, and lumbering along the rivers' banks. The elder Hilton, Edward, is spoken of by Winthrop "as a gentleman of good judgment." Neither of them is supposed to have been a Puritan. They came here in the interests of Capt. John Mason, who had a claim to the region under a royal grant. Capt. Mason was a strong Churchman, and it may be presumed that the Hiltons were like minded. The few accessions made during the first eight years were from a class of men with whom the Puritans had no sympathy either upon religion or moral grounds. In Prince's New England Chronology, I find this very significant entry, under date of Aug. 20th, 1630. Speaking of some who returned from the Plymouth Colony to England on account of sickness and threatened famine, and "of dislike of our Government, which restrained and punished their Excesses," the annalist

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\*Prince's Annals of N. E., vol. 1, p. 106.

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goes on to say that "others, also, afterwards hearing of Men of their own Disposition at *Pascataway*, went from us to them: whereby, tho' our numbers were lessened, yet we accounted ourselves nothing weakened by their Removal."\* It is almost certain that Dover got some recruits from this company.

In 1631, the ownership of the plantation passed to Lords Say and Brooks and others. Capt. Wiggin, who had been the agent of the old company and was continued in the same office by the new one, went back to England to procure more ample means for carrying on the plantation. In the fall of 1633, the Captain returned, having with him a number of families from the west of England, some of whom, according to Hubbard, were "of good estate and of some account for religion."

Among them was REV. WILLIAM LEVERIDGE. He was a graduate of Emanuel College, Cambridge. According to Winthrop he was "a godly minister." Belknap writes of him as "a worthy and able *Puritan* minister."

This first minister must have entered upon his work with great enthusiasm and energy. The settlers who came with him divided the lower part of the "Neck" into lots, with reference to building up "a compact town." It must have been under the inspiration of their minister that a meeting-house was first erected. It was placed upon the most elevated site, crowning the little settlement, and giving to it whatever grace and glory it might boast. It was a rude structure of logs and mud, but, like the temple of old, it was "beautiful for situation."

The place where the first church was built should forever remain sacred to us, and to our children after us. When

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\*Prince's Annals of N. E., vol. 1, p. 246.